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361 Plans of settlements.—The planning of pueblos and *rancherías* was unknown in pre-Columbian times. Settlements were amorphous, the dwellings irregularly spaced and connected by winding footpaths. Beginning around 1550, the Spaniards [177] slowly forced the natives in most parts of central Mexico to rebuild their towns on a grid street pattern, which is now predominant in most pueblos (Indian and mestizo) in Mexico.[34] The advantages of the grid, with numbered blocks and houses, are obvious in terms of tax and tribute records. Towns were also divided into *barrios* or wards, usually four or more; some *barrios* represent the congregation of outlying *rancherías* into the town. Within the Tarascan area the realinement of the street pattern was apparently continued until the close of the colonial period, for a late 18th-century description mentions the tortuous, unplanned paths and irregularly spaced houses of some Sierra pueblos, which today have the grid pattern (AGN Historia, vol. 73, ff. 285–405). At the present time only the Tarascan *ranchos* (formed after the colonial period without direction from a centralized government) are characterized by winding streets and scattered dwellings, and probably illustrate the pattern of a pre-Conquest village (map 15).

One of the outstanding features of the grid pattern imposed by the Spaniards is the plaza, or square, located in the center of the settlement. Every Tarascan village has its plaza, which functions as the commercial, social, and administrative center of the town (map 16; pl. 2). A [367] semblance of a garden and often a bandstand occupy the center of the plaza. Administrative [344] buildings (the *palacio municipal* or *jefatura* and the jail), often the school, stores, and the dwellings of the more prominent citizens face the streets bordering the plaza. Moreover, the square is the site of religious and civil festivals and the market. [346] The church, however, rarely faces the plaza, but is often placed one-half to one block distant.

Away from the plaza, which in the larger towns is surrounded by a contiguous group of buildings, most Tarascan pueblos in the Sierra are characterized by widely spaced dwellings separated by house lots. Compact towns with contiguous building throughout occur in the Lake region and in the Zacapu Basin. (Maps 16, 17; pl. 2.)

[TEXT CONTINUES bottom P. 27b]

[34] For a discussion of the introduction of the grid street pattern into New Spain, see Stanislawski, 1947 b.